ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT—21 FEBRUARY 1994

Lok Sabha	—	**Tenth Lok Sabha**
Session	—	**First Session of the Year**
President of India	—	**Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma**
Vice-President of India	—	**Shri K. R. Narayanan**
Prime Minister of India	—	**Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao**
Speaker, Lok Sabha	—	**Shri Shivraj V. Patil**

HON'BLE MEMBERS,

I welcome you to this session of Parliament.

As I address you in the new year, I sense that the country is today in a frame of mind different from the one it was in this time last year. We faced many difficulties at the beginning of the year 1993 but our people displayed tremendous resilience as the year progressed and 1993 ended certainly on a note of optimism. There was steady progress on all fronts as evidenced from the improved law and order situation, a record foodgrains production, unprecedented levels of procurement, very high levels of foodgrains stocks, containment of the rate of inflation at a single digit level, comfortable foreign exchange reserves, considerable reduction in trade gap, buoyancy in exports, improved performance in certain essential areas of the infrastructure sector, and increased inflow of foreign investment both direct and portfolio. All these have symbolised and justified this emerging optimism. Clearly, we have regained our elan internally and our confidence globally. We have reason and justification to feel encouraged at the all round performance. But we still have a long way to go before we achieve the objectives we have set for ourselves in social and economic development. It is on this note of cautious optimism that Government approaches its tasks in 1994.

There has been overall improvement in the law and order situation. The situation in regard to insurgency in the North-East has shown improvement. The gains of last year in Punjab were consolidated. The elections to the Assemblies in five States and the National Capital Territory of Delhi were peaceful. Government is determined to consolidate the gains of this improvement and address the areas of concern that still remain.

Around this time last year the Ayodhya issue had cast its long shadow on the national scene. There was a great deal of concern over the possible fall-out of the demolition and the riots that followed. Thanks to the inherent wisdom and sagacity of the Indian people, the grim predictions that were being made have been proved wrong. The atmosphere has improved considerably and we can hope for a lasting solution to the dispute. Proceedings are continuing in the Supreme Court on the reference made to it under the Constitution. Government will take appropriate measures in the light of the opinion of the Supreme Court.

The Ayodhya issue is the most convincing demonstration in recent times of the danger inherent in mixing communalism and politics. It is of utmost importance to correct this aberration and keep both religion and politics in their legitimate domains. Our secular State demands nothing less. The issue needs to be debated fully and effective measures evolved. The Government will welcome suggestions in this regard.

In Jammu and Kashmir we pursue our policy of firm action against terrorism. The police and the security forces have gained considerable success during the year in their counter-terrorist operations. Steps have been taken to further improve their operational efficiency. Every effort is made to see that the maximum restraint is exercised in the use of force. The grave crisis that arose in the Hazratbal Shrine was handled by the administration and the security forces in a commendable manner, with the cooperation of the people. The resolution of this crisis demonstrated the efficacy of Government's approach of restraint. Whenever there has been any incident suggesting excessive use of force, an inquiry has been promptly instituted and action taken. Action against the terrorists is continuing in order to restore law and order. At the same time appropriate measures are being taken to tone up the administration. Development and economic activities have been intensified to generate employment opportunities. We are deeply concerned about the difficulties of the common people and the grievance redressal mechanism has been strengthened. We are also pursuing steps to bring about effective involvement of the people in dealing with matters which concern them. Jammu and Kashmir is an inalienable part of India and we shall foil any attempt to destabilise it either from across the border or from any other quarter.

In the North-East the setting up of the interim Bodoland Autonomous Council in pursuance of the Bodo Accord marks a positive step forward towards meeting the aspirations of the tribal population. Prompt action was taken by the Government of Assam in the districts of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon when there was an outbreak of violence against the non-tribals. In Manipur, Government took action under article 356 of the Constitution following violence between Nagas and Kukis and general disruption of law

and order. This demonstrated the Government's will to curb disruptive elements effectively.

The National Commission on Human Rights has been set up with a former Chief Justice of India as its chairman. Members of the Commission include a former Judge of the Supreme Court and one former Chief Justice of a High Court. The setting up of the Commission is indicative of our continuing determination to deal with questions of human rights with promptitude and transparency. The Commission has started its work in right earnest.

In order to strengthen the accountability of the executive to Parliament, 17 Department related Standing Committees of Parliament were constituted in April, 1993 to make detailed examination of Bills, Demands for Grants, Annual Reports of the ministries and national basic long-term policy documents presented to the Houses. This will greatly facilitate the working of Parliament.

The country had its share of natural calamities. However, the unprecedented scale of damage in the Maharashtra earthquake stands out among these. In all these instances Government responded with commendable alertness and provided prompt relief. Governments of several other countries, the World Bank and other institutions promptly offered assistance and we are grateful to all of them. A massive reconstruction programme in the earthquake affected areas of Maharashtra is being taken up at an outlay of Rs. 1000 crores. Non-Governmental Organisations are being appropriately associated with the reconstruction programme.

The economic reforms introduced in 1991 gained momentum last year and have been pursued consistently. Still much more needs to be done. Government is aware that the reform is an irreversible and continuous process and needs to be implemented with determination and foresight, keeping the responses and circumstances in the country constantly in view. As a result of this approach, the progress of implementation has been steady and firm and based on a general consensus. We shall hasten with care.

Based on the performance and prospects of the public and private sectors, the area of reservation of the public sector has been trimmed and some more industries have been delicensed. The new Exim Policy announced on the 31st of March, 1993, attempted the streamlining of procedures and the liberalisation of exports in agriculture and services, where the country has a comparative advantage. The Budget for 1993-94 provided fiscal incentives for investments in thrust areas.

In drawing up the reform package, stress has been laid by the Government on reforms in the financial sector. The financial institutions

have necessarily to be restructured and strengthened to enable them to take on the new responsibility imposed by the expanded activity in the private sector. An important policy change was the unification of the exchange rate and the floating of the rupee in March, 1993. The fact that the rupee has remained steady since it was floated is testimony to the good judgement of the Government in the matter.

The basic economic indicators show that although the year started in a difficult environment, the performance of the economy during 1993-94 has been satisfactory. In 1992-93, the Gross Domestic Product is estimated to have grown by 4 per cent. In 1993-94, the Government expects the rate of growth to be maintained at about the same level. The inflation rate touched a low of below 6 per cent for a short period during this year, the highest level being 8.4 per cent.

Global investors have shown growing confidence in the Indian market. Direct Foreign Investment approved since the inception of the new Industrial Policy till the end of 1993 is now approximately Rs. 13,000 crores in terms of equity. The total investment in these projects is estimated to be of the order of Rs. 65,000 crores. The significant point of this investment is that the bulk of this, is proposed in sectors like power, oil refining, food processing, metallurgical industry, electrical equipment, chemicals, electronics and other priority areas. Only about 7 per cent of the proposed investment will be for products which could be categorised as consumer goods. The investment inflow will be spread over a period of 3-4 years which is the gestation period of the mega projects.

Government continues to lay a great deal of emphasis on export promotion. The results of changes in the trade policy coupled with the floating of the exchange rate and the general liberalisation of the economy have yielded results and exports have shown good growth recording an increase of around 20 per cent in dollar terms during April-December, 1993 compared to a little over 3 per cent in the corresponding period in 1992.

Government attaches the highest priority to development of agriculture. The timely provision of adequate and reasonably priced inputs and the creation of a structure that provides for the timely announcement of prices which in turn promotes higher production so as to meet fully the domestic needs of the country as well as exports, are the major objectives of the Government. In keeping with the overall strategy, the Plan outlay for the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation has been raised by 26.6 per cent from Rs. 1050 crores in 1992-93 to Rs. 1330 crores in 1993-94. The production of foodgrains during 1992-93 was 180 million tonnes which was more than the production in 1991-92 by 7.1 per cent. The *Kharif* foodgrains production in 1993-94 is expected to be 99 million tonnes. The prospects for *Rabi* are excellent.

Government is encouraging diversification of the agriculture sector through emphasis on horticulture, aquaculture, oilseeds, pulses and other commodities which have an export potential. This would be done without detriment to the interests of our own consumers. Steps are being taken to revitalise the rural cooperative credit system as also marketing, processing and other services essential to the farmers, particularly in the far-flung areas. Extension services would be broad-based keeping in view the new priorities in agriculture through greater involvement of the voluntary organisations.

As a measure of reducing poverty levels, our agricultural strategy would aim at increasing agricultural production in the rain-fed areas through an integrated strategy of soil and water conservation and increased use of agricultural inputs such as organics and bio-fertilisers and improved technology. During the Eighth Plan Rs. 1100 crores have been allocated for the restructured National Watershed Development Project for rain-fed areas. About 30 lakh hectares of land would be treated for sustainable production of food, fodder, fuel and fibre through dry land farming technology. Household production systems would diversify as a consequence and ultimately the income levels and employment opportunities for the watershed community would improve. The project would also enhance availability of groundwater resulting in drought proofing of the project areas. Nearly 2500 micro watersheds have been identified in rain-fed areas for development, and work on these has started.

The manufacturing capacity of nitrogenous fertilisers has been increased and more is being planned. The availability of raw materials required for fertiliser production within the country being limited, efforts are being made to set up joint ventures abroad, particularly in the Gulf and West Asia. Government will continue to take all measures required to bring about a balanced application of soil nutrients so that production levels are sustained.

As part of the Agriculture Policy, States have been advised to remove all intra and inter-state restrictions on the movement of foodgrains.

Government's commitment to safeguard the interests of the consumer remains as strong as ever. The Central issue price for the Revamped Public Distribution System areas continues to be kept at a price lower by Rs. 500 per metric tonne compared to the prices in the general Public Distribution System, to enhance affordability by the poor. At the inception of the scheme in 1992, 10,580 new fair price shops were estimated as required to be opened in the Revamped Public Distribution System areas to strengthen the delivery system. Against this, 11,681 new fair price shops have been opened in these areas, going beyond the target. New storage space of 1,81,296 tonnes has also been created or hired since the inception of the

scheme. A mid-term review of the Revamped Public Distribution System has revealed that nearly 1.5 million tonnes more of foodgrains went to the rural areas than before the inception of the scheme, thus adding a new rural dimension to the public distribution system. With a record food stock holding of 22 million tonnes in the central pool reached on 1st January 1994, resulting from stepped up procurement efforts, Government is comfortably placed to augment the coverage further in these areas, should it become necessary.

It is Government's determination that no vulnerable section of the population—be it women, children, minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Backward Classes—should remain outside the mainstream of development. In all areas of development of the poor, resource allocations were enhanced during 1993-94 compared to the previous year. The revised outlay for the Ministry of Rural Development went up by 56 per cent while the plan outlay of the Welfare Ministry was raised from Rs. 820 crores to Rs. 980 crores. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana has been strengthened in 120 most backward districts. The subsidies under the Integrated Rural Development Programme were enhanced by Rs. 1000 per household. The improved Tool Kits to Rural Artisans programme started in 1992-93 was extended in 1993-94 to 100 more districts, thus covering in all 162 districts in the country benefiting 2,30,000 rural artisans. Comprehensive programmes for the welfare and development of the weavers were evolved. They include housing, work sheds, handloom development centres, quality dyeing units, training in improved practices and provision of working capital. These programmes with a total outlay of Rs. 1372 crores were started during the year. The scheme for Handloom Development Centres and Quality Dyeing Units launched towards the end of 1993 seeks to merge and expand existing units and establish new ones. Against the 1993 target of 120 Centres and 20 Units, 213 Centres and 94 Units have been approved. Twenty-Five Centres and 25 Units have already started operating.

Government has formulated three new and innovative schemes to benefit the poor, particularly rural women and urban youth.

The Employment Assurance Scheme introduced in 1,752 of the most backward and remote blocks of the country, where seventeen crores of the country's poor people live, will provide assured wage employment for 100 days during the lean agricultural season to the rural labour. This scheme thus expands rural employment to fuller levels.

The Mahila Samriddhi Yojana will empower rural women by enabling them to gain and exercise control over their own earnings and household resources. Already, more than 4 lakh women have opened accounts under this scheme in rural post offices. This scheme, along with the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, would greatly enhance opportunities for self-employment among rural women.

To provide sustained employment to the educated urban youth in micro enterprises, a Rozgar Yojana has been launched. About 1,95,000 applications have been received so far from youth in different States. So far, 41,275 applications have been processed and recommended to banks and about 2,000 of them have also been sanctioned. During the current year, the scheme will cover 40,000 beneficiaries and from 1994-95 onwards it is intended to cover 2.20 lakh beneficiaries every year, thus, covering in all 7 lakh beneficiaries during the rest of the Eighth Plan Period. The Reserve Bank of India has been instructed to support the programme fully. The scheme provides for 22.5 per cent reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 27 per cent for the Other Backward Classes with preference for women.

A significant role has been envisaged for Non-Governmental Organisations in all these programmes to generate awareness and for their effective implementation.

To monitor the progress of implementation of the programmes of the weaker sections and to provide the direction and thrust required, the Prime Minister has set up a Special Cell in the Prime Minister's Office. This Special Cell will receive feedback from the implementing Departments and also information based on field visits and independent evaluations so as to remove all possible bottlenecks in the programmes. A Special Committee of Secretaries responsible for the implementation of these three programmes has also been set up to supervise the coordinated implementation of these programmes in the field.

Communication facilities will be further extended in rural areas. In 1993-94, 46,800 Panchayats will be connected by telephone. It is proposed to provide public telephone to 72,000 villages during 1994-95.

In the schemes for the welfare of Scheduled Castes, the allocation under Special Central Assistance for the Special Component Plan was augmented in 1993 and its scope expanded to include schemes for infrastructure development in areas with fifty per cent or more Scheduled Caste population.

An important landmark of the year was the passing of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act which would help the rapid implementation of the liberation and rehabilitation of the safai karmacharis. The National Commission is being constituted.

Government is fully alive to the situation arising from atrocities against the Scheduled Castes in certain parts of the country. Protection to the Scheduled Castes under the law as well as the effective implementation of programmes of socio-economic development meant for them would be ensured. During 1992-93, nearly 21 lakh Scheduled Caste families and

8 lakh Scheduled Tribe families were assisted to cross the poverty line under the 20 Point Programme. During 1993-94, the number of assisted families is likely to reach 27 lakh Scheduled Caste families and 9 lakh Scheduled Tribe families.

A scheme of Educational Complexes in areas where tribal female literacy is very low was initiated during the year. Thirteen such Complexes have so far been sanctioned. The turnover of Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India rose from Rs. 22 crores in 1991-92 to Rs. 86 crores in 1992-93. This is expected to be much higher in the current year.

The National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation made significant advances during the current year. During 1993 it sanctioned Rs. 80 crores as loans. In the coming year it proposes to double its operations.

The long awaited reservation of vacancies for Other Backward Classes in the services under the Government of India became a reality on 8th September, 1993 when the present Government issued orders for 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes. With this, one of the most important aspirations of the Other Backward Classes of the country has been met.

The work relating to the publication of the works of Baba Saheb Ambedkar in regional languages was taken forward and two volumes each were brought out in Hindi, Tamil and Gujarati, with the work in the other languages proceeding well. Eight Chairs have been sanctioned in different Universities for undertaking research in the philosophy of Baba Saheb.

A new Wakf Bill 1993 has been introduced in Parliament in August, 1993 replacing the existing Wakf Act, 1954 and the Wakf (Amendment) Act, 1984. This Bill, *inter-alia,* provides for a more democratic composition of the Wakf Board with provision of Wakf Tribunals to decide issues relating to Wakf matters and for better protection and management of Wakf properties. A National Minorities Finance and Development Corporation will become operational this year with an authorised share capital of Rs. 500 crores for promoting the economic development of the minorities. The modalities are being worked out.

In my last address to you I had referred to the review of the 1986 National Policy on Education undertaken in 1992 and the modifications effected. Government continues to give very high priority to literacy and primary education based on the innovative strategies of Total Literacy Campaigns backed by Post Literacy Campaigns and a new district-specific and community oriented approach to primary education. All the 18 districts of Kerala and Pondicherry* have achieved total literacy. In the 32 districts which have already successfully concluded the Total Literacy Campaigns. Post Literacy Campaigns, have been launched to ensure that neo-literates

* Now known as Puducherry.

do not lapse into illiteracy. At present 238 Total Literacy Campaigns are going on in 258 districts.

The new District Primary Education Programme lays emphasis on participatory planning and management and focuses on the education of girls. It seeks to enhance school effectiveness through inputs in teachers' training and decentralised management. India played host recently to the Education for All summit of the nine high population countries of the world when our commitment as well as that of the international community to achieving Education for All by the turn of the century was reaffirmed. On this occasion the Prime Minister announced Government's decision to raise the outlay on education to 6 per cent of the GDP by the turn of the century. This will be kept in view while formulating the Ninth Five year Plan. Further, through disaggregated target setting and decentralised management Government aims to achieve its objective of Education for All.

On account of sustained efforts of the Government of India and the State Governments in the implementation of the National Family Planning Programme, the annual rate of growth of population is showing a declining trend. The annual average exponential rate of growth in 1981-91 was 2.14 per cent. The annual rate of increase has come down to 1.9 per cent in 1992. The Crude Birth Rate which was 41.7 per thousand in 1951-61 has come down to 29 per thousand in 1992. The Crude Death Rate which was 22.8 in 1951-61 has come down to 10 in 1992. The Total Fertility Rate which was 5.97 in 1951-61 has come down to 3.6 in 1991. The Infant Mortality Rate for the country as a whole has come down from 146 per thousand live births in 1961 to 79 in 1992. While these are significant achievements, yet the increase in numbers is staggering. Government attaches the highest importance to the reduction in the rate of growth of population. There is a national consensus to promote Family Welfare. Multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral efforts involving State Governments, opinion leaders, Non-Governmental Organisations and all sections of the society are essential. All political parties must unanimously exhort the people to adopt the small family norm and transform the family planning programme into a mass movement. The National Development Council (NDC) has endorsed the recommendations of the Committee on population set up by it earlier. The NDC also decided that wider consultations should take place on the future course of action needed for the implementation of the recommendations of the NDC Committee with Chief Ministers and opinion makers. This will be done shortly.

We are aware of the linkages between the development process and the protection of the environment. The need for the conservation and wise use of natural resources is reflected in our major river cleaning and pollution abatement programmes, as in our forest and wildlife policies. While participating in the continuing international debate on bio-diversity, climate

change and desertification, we have kept in focus the basic issue raised in the Rio Summit of 1992 of access to resources and technology. Within the Government, our development efforts will take full note of all our environmental concerns.

The Space programmes have made steady progress. We had a failure in the flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, but this has been put to good use. The data collected has been analysed and it has proven the effectiveness of complex systems involved. The next flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle is planned for August-September, 1994. There has also been progress in the development of the Indian Geo-Synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle, which would enable launch of INSAT class of satellites some years hence. The successful launch and commissioning of INSAT-2B last year, within a year of commissioning INSAT-2A, is a demonstration of our capabilities. INSAT-2B has enabled Doordarshan to augment its services with five satellite channels. This has strengthened the programmes telecast by Doordarshan in regional languages.

India has a strong and large scientific and industrial infrastructure. It also has demonstrated capability in several high technology fields. In this context I am sure Honourable Members will join me in applauding the successful demonstration of high technology in the launch of 'Agni' last Saturday. The pace of technological changes and the need to shift to technologies which are environment-compatible impose upon us various demands. Restrictions being placed on transfer of technology require us to rely even more on our own talents. Government is determined to give every encouragement for this to happen by tapping the great potential that the country possesses. In the context of the emerging economic scenario, the benefits of research will be harnessed for use by industry. A fillip will be given to exports of high technology products. The thrust will be on information technologies and genetic engineering and biotechnology. Advanced materials and devices for use of sloar and other non-conventional energy sources will also be priority areas.

Our Armed Forces maintain their constant vigil on our borders to safeguard the territorial integrity of our country. The nation is proud of them and of the defence scientists and engineers who have contributed commendably to our defence preparedness. Progress in the indigenous development of arms and ammunition and the diversification of the defence production units is proceeding apace.

In addition to their normal duties, the armed forces have been assisting the civil authorities in maintaining law and order, whenever required and in counter-insurgency operations. They have also been helping in rescue and relief operations in times of natural disasters. Their performance in these areas has been exemplary. Government remains committed to providing

better facilities and conditions to serving and retired armed forces personnel. Those posted in field areas have recently been granted higher allowances. It has been decided to extend the benefit of the one-time increase scheme in pensions to an additional two lakh pensioners.

As a result of sustained international marketing, Government has succeeded in instilling confidence in the international community that India is among the safest tourism destinations of the world. This has resulted in an all time record of arrival of tourists in the months of December, 1993 and January, 1994 registering an increase of 23.8 per cent and 28.4 per cent respectively over the corresponding months in 1992 and 1993.

The foreign policy of the Government focussed during the last one year on securing our economic interests in our relations with countries abroad while continuing to promote our political and security interests. The significance of our economic reforms was effectively conveyed abroad.

Our relations with our neighbours continued to be cordial, and our interaction in various fields with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka recorded good progress during the year. In the case of Pakistan, however, its continuing support for terrorism and subversion in J&K and anti-Indian activities world-wide seriously hampered our efforts at normalising relations. The Prime Minister offered Pakistan a dialogue aimed at establishing good-neighbourly relations as enshrined in the Simla Agreement. Bilateral talks have since taken place, but the stridency of Pakistan's anti-Indian statements has grown, adversely affecting efforts at improving bilateral ties. There are no quarrels between us and the people of Pakistan. We feel that for good relations between our countries the Government of Pakistan should give up its negative approach and reciprocate our desire to normalise India-Pakistan relations in accordance with the Simla Agreement.

Our relations with China have improved markedly. The Prime Minister's visit to China in September 1993, and the signing of the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control have brought them to a new stage of development. The Expert Group set up under this Agreement held its first meeting recently, reflecting the desire of the both sides to maintain and continue the interaction on this complex issue.

India values SAARC as an instrument of regional cooperation consistent with the objectives of its Charter. The Prime Minister attended the SAARC Summit in Dhaka last year. SAARC has recorded progress in dealing with certain important issues of common interest such as poverty, terrorism, population growth, problems relating to the status of women, children, youth and drugs and psychotropic substances. We continue to play an active role in SAARC with a view to promoting its socio-economic and other objectives in accordance with the SAARC Charter.

Our interaction with the United States has traditionally ranged over a number of areas from Education and Science and Technology to Culture and Sports. We have also cooperated in the UN on issues relating to disarmament such as the comprehensive test ban treaty. The response from the United States to our economic liberalisation policies has been very positive and the U.S. investments in India in the last two years were very substantial. We look forward to working with the United States towards mutual understanding, including on those issues on which such understanding needs enhancement. This will reflect the vibrant democratic and secular ideals of our two countries.

Relations with the Russian Federation, drawing upon the rich traditions of our friendship of the past, continued with mutual understanding and cooperation. Despite certain difficulties the two countries face, cooperation in the political, economic, commercial and other areas was sought to be promoted by both sides. The goodwill and understanding that underpins our relations reinforce our joint efforts at identifying possibilities of further cooperation in various areas in today's changed context.

Special attention was given to strengthening relations with the Central Asian region. The Prime Minister paid very successful visits to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 1993. The Uzbek and Kazakh Presidents also visited India during the past year. A number of accords have been signed between India and these two countries in fields ranging from political cooperation and cooperation in science and technology to trade, civil aviation and culture.

A concerted effort was made to forge a new era of closer cooperation with ASEAN and East Asian countries. New economic linkages were established and trade increased. The commencement of a sectoral dialogue between India and the ASEAN was a notable development. The Prime Minister's visit to Thailand in April, 1993 gave a new impetus to Indo-Thai relations. India-Singapore relations were qualitatively upgraded and Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore visited India as Chief Guest at our Republic Day celebrations in January this year. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia and President Soeharto of Indonesia also visited India in December, 1993. Our ties with Vietnam were reinforced with the visit of the Vice-President to Vietnam in September, 1993. The Government continued to make sustained efforts to further enhance economic and other linkages with Japan. The Prime Minister's visit to the Republic of Korea in September, 1993, with a view to lending further momentum to bilateral economic ties with that country, received a positive response.

Our relations with the Gulf countries, traditionally cordial, are now marked by increasing economic interaction. The Prime Minister's visits to Oman and Iran in September, 1993 laid the foundations of an expanding relationship for mutual economic benefit.

We welcome the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between Israel and the PLO in September, 1993 as a notable step towards peace and stability in West Asia and the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

The importance attached by India and the European Union to further developing mutually beneficial relations in diverse fields was symbolised by a Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development concluded on December 20, 1993 and the Indo-EU Joint Statement on Political Dialogue. High level dignitaries who visited India from Europe during the past year included the President of Ireland, the King of Sweden and the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. The Prime Minister recently paid a very successful visit to Davos in Switzerland and to Germany. At Davos the Prime Minister addressed a worldwide audience of industrialists, political leaders and academicians. As a result, the appreciation of India's policies and potential has grown. The visit to Germany has given a further impetus to bilateral ties and has strengthened economic cooperation.

The state visits which I undertook to Ukraine, Turkey and Hungary in July, 1993 were a manifestation of our desire to consolidate our cooperative ties with these countries.

During the year we had wide interaction with countries in sub-Saharan Africa including visits at the level of President and Prime Minister from Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We have noted the positive developments in South Africa and look forward to the early establishment of majority rule there.

India continues to play an active role in shaping the global agenda on issues pertaining to political and security matters, economic and social development, human rights, environment and population. In the various meetings of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement or other international bodies on these issues, we have taken a lead in articulating the specific concerns of the developing countries with a view to promoting a global consensus.

1993 was a year of consolidating the gains of the economic reforms and the political initiatives of the Government. We entered 1994 with the optimism of accelerating our pace of economic growth, strengthened by a reassuring verdict of the people in favour of reforms and against the forces of communalism.

I am confident your debates and deliberations in the course of this session and beyond will take the nation forward in fulfilling the aspirations of the people. I commend you to your tasks and wish you all success.

Jai Hind.